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FASHION, DRESS, COSTUME: A PROPOSED TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION IN THE HISTORICAL RESEARCH OF WOMEN'S CLOTHING

Abstract: *This paper delineates the conceptual variations between the notions 'fashion', 'dress' and 'costume' in English-language texts on women's garment histories using relevant examples from interwar Romanian periodicals. The aim is to offer a more precise formulation, as these three terms have largely been used interchangeably. This paper is built on an interdisciplinary model stemming from fashion studies towards semiotics, sociology and cultural and art history. I define 'fashion' as a permanently changing progeny of modernity linked to capitalism and consumerism, but also to modernism and technological progress. 'Dress' is a generalised term for clothing worn in a variety of contexts connected more to identity or activity. 'Costume' narrows the scope of 'dress' to a particular style or outfit suggesting specific markers of social position, occupation or ethnicity and can often be deemed as necessary for admission, recognition or acceptability in certain contexts. 'Fashion' would then chiefly apply to cultural studies or history, 'dress' to anthropology or sociology and 'costume' to ethnology or media and art history. Using interwar Romanian examples, this paper offers a viable terminological clarification regarding genre, subject, scope and usability for historical sartorial themes.*
Keywords: *fashion; dress; costume; terminology; women's clothing; history.*

In January 1930, writer Adrian Dorea authored a two-page article in *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată (Our Illustrated Gazette)* exploring the themes of décolletage and nudes. From his perspective, despite the nude's acceptance in classical or modern works of art, uncovered bodies do not translate from marble or canvas to flesh. Furthermore, apart from Dorea's apparent distaste for what could be termed as 'indecency,' his

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exemplifications also hint of colonial and historical biases. According to him, even "the savages from Africa" felt the need to cover themselves in various degrees. He then proceeded to offer historical examples of excessive coverings for women "imposed by the men's jealousy," including Middle Age dress and chastity belts. Yet, he wondered what would come of women's beauty if they were fully veiled and corseted as dictated by "the fashions from a few decades ago." In his view, beauty did not "bear the terror of a diseased pudicity." For him, the need to display the attractive and socially acceptable parts of a woman's body gave birth to the idea of décolletage. While practiced since ancient times, its modern understanding according to Dorea is a Renaissance invention, from where he briefly lists the major variations until the twentieth century. By 1900, he explained, the fashionable women were "thin, aesthetic, aetheric, Pre-Raphaelitic… with appearances of daring décolletages" and with the advent of sport and leisure culture where women "fight on an equal foot with the men," bare skin was no longer reprehensible. Consequently, he believed moving from bathing suits to nudism "practiced in Germany and especially in Bavaria" would no longer be a shocking pursuit[1].

This paper aims to offer a terminological clarification in literature engaging in sartorial histories between the three terms that are commonly used interchangeably yet are not actually synonymous: fashion, dress and costume. Consequently, it would assist in differentiating areas of analysis and identifying a text's subject and goals by offering the particular areas which each of these terms can occupy. For this, I will use an informed disciplinary methodological approach[2] stemming from fashion studies towards a semiotic analysis of visual and written texts, sociological and linguistic considerations, as well as a historical, cultural and social contextualisation. Each term will be analysed according to the relevant theory and added examples from interwar Romanian magazines and newspapers articles debating these ideas.

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[1] Adrian Dorea, "Dela decolteu la nud." *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, III/132, (25 January 1930):12-13.
[2] See Lisa R. Lattuca, "Creating Interdisciplinarity: Grounded Definitions from College and University Faculty," *History of Intellectual Culture* 3, no. 1, (2003):1–20.

All human societies have been practicing some form of covering and adorning the body, driven by need, creativity or symbolism[3]. Along with specific forms of bodily modification, such as tattooing, clothing the body functions as creators of a unitary identity image of a frame "shaping it together with the surrounding world"[4]. With the evolution of modernity towards industrialisation and urbanisation, the very rapid expansion of cities especially in the West provided "the ideal ecology for fashion". From this point forward, as Elizabeth Wilson observed, as an integral element in the modernity and urbanisation equation, as fashion flourished, its rhythm of constant change increased exponentially[5]. 'Dress' can occupy either of these spaces, especially if analysed from a panoramic perspective. 'Costume' is mainly linked to creativity or symbolism, depending on its context, but if used retroactively it could suggest a past utilitarian connection. While not entirely erasing the utility of certain garments, 'fashion' primarily functions on a symbolic level, where the main aesthetic credit belongs to the designer. Yet, the wearer or fashion consumer can display some agency by combining individual pieces from a pool of choices limited by their financial means. Even more, while communicating through dress and especially through costume can generate coherent messages immediately decoded by those acquainted with its symbols, fashion's articulation is inherently complex and everchanging.

Yet the social control systems needed predictability and stability, to which fashion could and would not comply. This led to extreme cases of limiting legislation, including a 1472 enforcement of sumptuary laws by the Venetian State forbidding "all new fashions"[6]. In the earliest years of twentieth-century modernity, middle class women in Germany used "gender-related values" in expressing their "new bourgeois identity" namely through their sartorial choices. As Gudrun Andersson explained, the prevalent gendered stereotypes employed in these practices were the

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[3] Bernard Barber and Lyle S. Lobel, "'Fashion' in Women's Clothes and the American Social System." *Social Forces* 31, no. 2, (1 December 1952): 125.

[4] Patrizia Calefato, *The Clothed Body*, translated by Lisa Adams, Oxford and (New York: Berg, 2004),6.

[5] Elizabeth Wilson, "Urbane Fashion," in Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (eds.), *Fashion's World Cities*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 33.

[6] Barton Beebe, "Intellectual Property Law and the Sumptuary Code," *Harvard Law Review* 123, no. 4 (2010): 811.

"rational masculinity" as opposed to the "domestic femininity," eventually adopted throughout Europe[7]. These set identity models were eventually challenged in the 1920s, when the flapper or *garçonne* identity implied a state of continuous consumption, living in the eternal present, rebellious towards the past and oblivious of the future. As Rebecca Arnold asserted, the negative reactions towards the flapper on grounds of morality also determined a differentiation between the so-called 'real' life and the constant pursuit of ephemeral thrills[8]. The twentieth century blurred the lines between classes, eliminating status symbols at least at a first glance. Belonging to a certain social class was no longer a matter of birth, profession or marriage, it could now be 'imagined' through fashion[9].

For a Clearer Fashion

Dissatisfied with the oversimplistic description of fashion in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a way of doing something" stemming from the Latin *facere* (to do), Christopher Breward highlighted the term's fluidity and consequently impossibility to properly define as it is constantly shifting from being a verb, noun or adjective[10]. The 'fashionable object' found "throughout the anthropocene, from prehistory onwards and across the globe" draws its significance depending on specific historical, social, cultural, economic and geo-political contexts[11]. Elizabeth Wilson contended that fashion, like photography, is a "liminal form" between art and non-art, a snapshot of a moment that once it is frozen in time, it becomes the past[12]. Six months before the Great Depression in 1929, the short-lived Romanian women's magazine *Domniţa (The Little Lady)* offered an overview of current

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[7] Gudrun Andersson, "Too Anxious to Please: Moralising Gender in Fashion Magazines in the Early Nineteenth Century", in *History of Retailing and Consumption*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 2020 (2021): 2.

[8] Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century*, (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 3.

[9] Ibid, 4.

[10] Christopher Breward, "Fashion", *Textile History* 50, no. 2, (2019): 206.

[11] Ibid, 207.

[12] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. 2nd edn, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), vii.

styles in a two-page illustrated fashion spread. In the short text accompanying seven elaborate drawings, the author signing only as Monique asserted that "fashion evolves and is always in perfect accord with the era it reigns upon," as a retort to critics deeming it "capricious and illogical" with "little justification." Monique viewed "the fashion of tomorrow" as a "delicate and subtle issue," but that "the great creators from Paris believe that it will be a consequence of today's fashion." Unaware of the tremendous shifts to come, the author did not "see any sensational change" and believed that the silhouette and the fashionable "elegant lines" would remain a staple of style "for a while." Monique cited Descher, "the great creator from Paris," who predicted the use of natural silk as a better and more comfortable option than its artificial "great rival." The great couturiers, she concluded, were expected to indicate the season's colours and the "mostly geometric drawings" offering a "simple and elegant *décor*"[13].

Fashion's spread is a contentious matter. Although commonly perceived as a global phenomenon, its origin and decision-making points have been until recently around Western Europe and in some ways the United States. In this context, as Sandra Niessen observed, definitions of 'fashion' seem to follow an Orientalist model, where 'fashion' and civilization are in the west and everywhere else is 'non-fashion'[14]. In this sense, Western clothing would be 'fashion,' while their non-Western variants become 'dress.' Because of this, Niessen highlighted the imperative need for fashion studies to expand its territory beyond the Western space for a better understanding of global culture[15]. Fortunately, in the past decade such spaces have increasingly been present, yet fashion studies research on Romania has yet to gain momentum. In the case of interwar Romania, following fashion was also a daring identity move bridging Bucharest and the province. An example is an article published by writer Lucrezzia Kar in *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* about the "provincial coquette" and her need for fashion. The author's main goal was to advise her readers not to chastise small-town Romanian women,

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[13] Monique. "Moda", *Domniţa*, (8 February 1929): 8-9.
[14] Sandra Niessen, "Re-Orienting Fashion Theory," in *The Fashion Reader*, (eds),Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, 2nd edn, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2014), 150-151.
[15] *Ibid*, 155.

especially those living in hardship and poverty. In Kar's view, the proverbial "province" was enough of a cruel, difficult space for lower middle-class and especially working-class women for them to be further judged for fashionability and a desire to look and feel attractive. Seeking adventure, she explained, was a hard-worked provincial woman's "wish to improve an unbearable interior life"[16].

In the past decades, the notion has been defined either as a popular, mundane routine of putting on clothes or as a form of discourse with its own language[17]. As Malcolm Barnard observed, messaging has been the prevailing differentiation element in the latter sense when applied to cultural studies or fashion journalism[18]. Yet, he continued, this process cannot claim a sender with "complete knowledge or understanding of the message." This would justify the idea of 'noise' in fashion communication as the messages or fragments that are delivered without the sender's implicit intention or knowledge[19]. Communication through fashion is overall a "human/prosthesis relation," neither hybrid nor explanatory. Instead, it "makes what we understand and experience as human as possible," allowing for "humanism's dualisms" extending beyond a simple exchange between a sender and a receiver[20]. This can extend to the semiological model as well, inferring that it is impossible to determine the 'first' signifier or signified in communication, in this context through fashion. Its "non-simple and non-common sense origin" produces a paradox into an infinity where "it either recedes or proceeds". While not entirely flawed, he concluded, the semiological model would need "some rethinking and adjustment," but the sender/receiver model should be retired at least from fashion journalism in its constant attempt to extract hidden meanings from celebrity outfits[21]. Yet, contextualising fashion's messaging through design or writing within its "dedication to constant change" as a "formalised telos" especially within the scope of

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[16] Lucrezzia Kar, "Cocheta din provincie," *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, III/135, (11 February 1930): 5.
[17] Malcolm Barnard, "Fashion as Communication Revisited," *Popular Communication* 18, no. 4 (1 October 2020): 259.
[18] Ibid, 260.
[19] Ibid, 262.
[20] Ibid, 264.
[21] Ibid, 268-269.

the Avant Garde is achieved more openly than in other forms of expression[22].

The advent of 'fashion' as a modern notion essentially "created a new world" based upon an ardent will for progress and ephemeral creative displays[23]. The widening timeline of modernity as described by Anthony Giddens extends to the seventeenth-century European ideas and practices subsequently spread worldwide[24]. Echoes of fashionability can be traced as far back as the 1300s in Western Europe, with the 1400s as a likely starting point for the acceleration in stylistic changes[25]. As Raffaella Monia Calia described it, 'fashion' is "a social device of 'modernity,' changeable *par excellence*" engaged in coding and decoding communication, culture, consumption, society, production and creativity[26]. In June 1934, the weekly magazine *5 Lei* published an anonymous article on personality used for interpreting fashion in its regular *Pentru dvs. doamnă (For You Madam)* column. It began by comparing fashion to "clay in the hands of a gifted woman with personal taste," which would imply that the author considered it unquestionably as an exclusively feminine pursuit. The general thread of the article is centred around the idea that not every fashionable style and colour could fit every woman's physique. The mitigating factor was individual discernment of the advantageous colours and cuts and chose her outfits accordingly[27].

As a product of modernity, fashion is intrinsically linked to consumerism. If viewed from a power perspective, the possibility to purchase exclusive fashionable items can become a marker of superiority by "conjuring with and renegotiating the power relations of status and

[22] Ulrich Lehmann, "Introduction to 'Fashion and the Modern,'" *Art in Translation* 7, no. 2 (2015): 268.

[23] Carlo Marco Belfanti, "The Civilization of Fashion: At the Origins of a Western Social Institution." *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 2, (2009): 261.

[24] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. 1990, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 1.

[25] Belfanti, "The Civilization of Fashion": 261-262.

[26] Raffaella Monia Calia, "The Imaginary Dress. An Interdisciplinary Fashion Approach Among Sociological, Anthropological, and Psychological Orientations", *Fashion Theory* 25, no. 2 (2021): 244.

[27] "Personalitatea în interpretarea modei", *Cinci Lei*, II/28, (16 June 1934): 2.

identity"[28]. Women are most described as 'fashion victims', rather than active decision-making agents within their identity-marking process. This can be ascribed to the general notion of women as passive followers or, in the modern sense, consumers, which can also explain why fashion has been relegated to the marginal purported 'women's pursuits' area as an unimportant subject, unworthy of serious academic attention. In this sense, writing on the sociology of fashion but with wider implications, Patrick Aspers and Frédéric Godart articulated two essential steps for fashion research, namely "a clear definition and more academic legitimacy"[29]. Yet this rhetoric is not new, particularly in social research. Already in 1952, Bernard Barber and Lyle S. Lobel decried the vagueness in the usage of the term 'fashion' which, along with its association with women as inherently irrational, remains an "overgeneralized term"[30].

Another key differentiation between fashion and other terms for wearing clothing is its inherent connection to capitalism and consumerism. While certain cities have received the title of 'fashion capitals,' of which Paris has remained the strongest contender, 'dress' and 'costume' cannot claim such designations. Paris notably has been defining its identity in terms of fashion, equating *la mode* with the French capital itself[31]. Similarly, 'fashion industry' is a commonly accepted notion, but adding 'industry' to dress or costume would require extensive explanation. This inclination towards materialism has been one of the main contention points against fashion and capitalism in general. Furthermore, its reprehensible qualities from this point of view could also derive from fashion's willingness to structure itself around an "economic nucleus" that "arts are mostly content to ignore"[32]. Yet fashion designers routinely present themselves as artists and their designs, particularly in *haute couture*, as works of art. Comparably,

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[28] Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety...*, 3.

[29] Patrik Aspers and Frédéric Godart, "Sociology of Fashion: Order and Change", *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, (2013): 172.

[30] Barber and Lobel, "'Fashion' in Women's Clothes": 124.

[31] Agnès Rocamora, "Paris, Capitale de La Mode: Representing the Fashion City in the Media," in *Fashion's World Cities*, (eds) C. Breward and D. Gilbert, 46-47.

[32] Lehmann, "Introduction to 'Fashion and the Modern'": 267.

although fashion has been accused of promoting "fetishistic commodities," it has constantly proven to have a positive emotional impact and a "performative power, both on a collective and individual level" in capitalism and as a disruptor of "authoritarian tendencies"[33]. Despite such notions permeating through the interwar Romanian discourse on fashionability, in a 1929 late-spring fashion chronicle published in *Femeea Elegantă (The Elegant Woman)*, the anonymous author added a curious statement to its regular description of the season's particularities. Pursuing fashion was for the author an indirect assistance for "many activity circles and our numerous commerce houses." The readers were advised to hence frequent such establishments and to only avoid "eccentric costumes which are not in concordance with our nature or disposition." The general trend stemming from trend was simplicity, which, the author cautioned, should not be confused for carelessness, which would never be imputed to Parisian elegant women. Fabrics with new models, the article concluded, have been generally absent due to the global financial crisis[34]. The idea of carelessness in dress was echoed nine years later in *Jurnalul Doamnei (The Lady's Journal)* in an article alarmingly announcing in bold letters that "evening elegance is in danger.'' The equally anonymous author decried the sight of women wearing street wear instead of proper elegant gowns, throughout interwar Bucharest's restaurants and clubs. According to the article, regardless of a woman's professional role during the day, "she must become a woman again" in the evening. Even more, the author added, if formal evening wear would no longer become a staple of social encounters, then imaginative attires according to or setting new fashions would no longer have where to bloom[35]. The conclusion would be that, at least for this author, fashion is the equivalent of eveningwear and its extravagant incarnations, while streetwear is but a simple, uninteresting and unimaginative form of display.

But the 'fashion system' as a "transfer of meaning" extends beyond its industrial aspect, from creativity and conception to production,

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[33] Djurdja Bartlett, "Can Fashion Be Defended?" in *Fashion and Politics*, Djurdja Bartlett (ed), (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 17.
[34] "Cronica modei", *Femeea Elegantă*, IV/5, (May 1929): 1.
[35] "Seri bucureștene", *Jurnalul Doamnei*, 4, 1938 :18.

dissemination, consumption and interpretation[36]. This would be applied to "clothes deemed acceptable by a brand or whichever tastemakers are in power," with a slight variation in the case of high fashion[37]. This also adds a marketing dimension to fashion dissemination to a particular social category or group deemed as target audience. For instance, in the 1920s, the flapper was identified as a prime consumer[38] until the Great Depression. Yet the practice of women continually overriding current social, cultural and gender norms has become a staple of emancipation[39], whether or not fashion itself was accepted as a positive practice. The 1920s decade can also provide an illustration of how a major archaeological discovery triggered a powerful reaction in the fashion world. Playing upon a longstanding fascination with Ancient Egypt, Howard Carter's 1922 discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb generated an "immediate wave of 'Tutmania' and generalized 'Egyptomania'" most visible in fashion. Yet as Karin J. Bohleke observed, this instance remains the pivotal moment of Egyptomania due to the lack of data, resources and sufficient research of previous Egypt-inspired trends up to the nineteenth century[40].

The fluidity implied by fashion may be the result of the social, political, economic and cultural instability of the twentieth century. Arnold surmised the reliance on "the constructed images of the fashion world" as strong yet short-lived identity markers functioned as grounding mechanisms for individuals otherwise "alienated from more traditional notions of status linked to their work and environment"[41]. If understood sociologically, fashion then becomes an omnipresent social identifier, which justifies a generalised analysis covering all aspects of life[42]. The understanding of fashion as an inherently modern, capitalist system implies a simplification of production and a significant reduction

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[36] Grant McCracken, "The Fashion System,", *The Fashion Reader*, 135.

[37] Ibid, 135-137; Lauren Boumaroun, "Becoming Annie: When Film Costume and Fashion Converge," *Fashion Theory* 21, no. 6 (2017): 654.

[38] Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

[39] Ibid, 4.

[40] Karin J. Bohleke, "Mummies Are Called upon to Contribute to Fashion: Pre-Tutankhamun Egyptian Revivalism in Dress," *Dress* 40, no. 2 (October 1, 2014): 94.

[41] Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety...*, 3-4.

[42] Aspers and Godart, "Sociology of Fashion": 172.

in costs from conception to consumption. Yet the world of fashion itself is hierarchical, with ready-made clothing or *prêt-à-porter* at the bottom and *haute couture* or high fashion at the top. While the former is characterised by factory series-production, low quality and wide affordability, the latter relies on visible extravagance, uniqueness and exorbitant prices. As Arnold described it, high fashion in the first half of the twentieth century meant "couturiers fabricating spectacular fantasies of luxury for the upper echelons of society"[43]. Here too status is imagined, but the differentiating factor is the client's ability and willingness to pay for such services. Status becomes economic, with fashionability as an identifier. This is the main differentiation from the notion of 'dress' as a generalised term for clothing practices and 'costume' as specific patterns of dress, as also illustrated above in the *Jurnalul Doamnei* article.

Decoding Dress

While decrying the overgeneralised use of the term 'fashion,' Barber and Lobel's sociological definition is more akin to 'dress.' Their understanding of 'fashion' "in clothes" refers to any garment or accessory that is "socially prescribed and socially accepted as appropriate for certain social roles, and especially with the recurring changes in these styles"[44]. To ease the confusion between these two notions, one could infer that fashion is modern, dress is social and costume is individual. The confusion is widened by the fact that fashion and social class-identification dress continued to coexist at least until the Enlightenment. Carlo Marco Belfanti asserted that even in the sixteenth century and possibly later, dress remained a "largely accurate indicator of social class and/or ethnic group." Even more, he continued, particular outfits were informed by the wearer's status and by "traditions established in various communities, which he or she had to observe"[45]. From this, it could be inferred that the recognizable elements of such styles of dress could be ascribed to the notion of 'costume.'

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[43] Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*,... 4.
[44] Barber and Lobel, ""Fashion" in Women's Clothes": 126.
[45] Belfanti, "The Civilization of Fashion": 263.

In its most basic sense, Joanne Entwistle defined 'dress' in terms of its "intimate relationship to the body" as a form of second skin that functions as an extra boundary "between self and other"[46]. Even more, according to Wilson, clothes are both objects and images, offering a subtler communication than "most objects and commodities" encompassing both their relationship to the body and our overall identity[47]. Roland Barthes differentiated the verb 'dressing' as a personalised wearing of clothes that are proper in a certain context, while the noun 'dress' is of a sociological or historical interest as a "vestimentary system"[48]. 'Fashion' was for Barthes a component of 'dress' either as "an object artificially elaborated by specialists at any one moment" subsequently propagated downwards to the masses, or as a sartorial decision made by an individual or group that has spread upwards as a new generalised trend[49].

As a symbolic practice, dress can be ascribed to expressing the adherence or sympathy to certain ideological, philosophical or cultural movements. Such styles are not necessarily fashionable, yet they may be adopted by fashion designers entirely or partially. Examples include the Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetic Movement particularly in Great Britain or the utopian dress enforced by the early-USSR legislators as a solution to the urgency they felt for a "clean break with the past"[50]. Yet the failure to implement this sartorial utopia led to an official acceptance of what Djurdja Bartlett termed as "socialist fashion" in the 1930s[51]. As she explained, this model of fashionability was represented as grandiose and luxurious intended as a contrast to everyday realities and was imposed on all new Socialist states after the "Communist takeovers in 1948"[52].

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[46] Joanne Entwistle, "The Dressed Body," in *The Fashion Reader*, 138.

[47] Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams...*, vii.

[48] Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, Edited by Andy Stafford and Michael Carter. Translated by Andy Stafford, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 9.

[49] Ibid, 10.

[50] Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010), 1.

[51] Ibid, 5.

[52] Ibid, 7.

Dressing the body hence implies disguising it in the same manner as language does so for thought[53].

But, as Entwistle contended, the body is both intimate and social, where clothes are used to cover undesirable aspects and highlight those increasing one's social or aesthetic acceptance[54]. In this sense, Wilson explained that dress is the link between the body to its "social being" making for an "uneasy territory" as it implies an inherent recognition that the human body is an "organism in culture," instead of a mere "biological entity"[55]. Owing to these social implications, 'dress' would be the proper term for classifications of 'dress codes' as part of attendance protocols determined by specific geographic, cultural or contextual requirements[56]. The codes themselves imply a sort of message articulated through dress, bringing it closer to the idea of fashion as a form of communication[57]. However, it could be argued that despite both suggesting symbolic meanings, communication through fashion aims to make a statement, instead of a marker of social, ethnic or professional identity or appropriate appearance in a certain context. Apart from formal and ceremonial court attires, the most formal clothing piece for women remains the ball gown to this day, as the equivalent to the men's 'white tie'[58]. The semi-formal women's outfits must include a long or short evening dress, akin to the men's 'black tie'[59]. While formal day dress, including morning and afternoon outfits, is today chiefly associated to British daytime events such as Ascot[60], interwar Romanian women still observed these rules, as exemplified by the Băneasa genuine fashion parades. For instance, in 1937, Bucharest's French-language daily *Le Moment (The Moment)* added an illustrated representation of the "fashion prize at Băneasa" with six of the most elegant outfits alongside

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[53] Calefato, *The Clothed Body*, 5.

[54] Entwistle, "The Dressed Body", 140.

[55] Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams...*, 2.

[56] Olivier Arifon, "Invitations and Dress Codes," in *An Expert's Guide to International Protocol*, (eds) Gilbert Monod de Froideville and Mark Verheul, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 140.

[57] Barnard, "Fashion as Communication Revisited": 260.

[58] Arifon, "Invitations and Dress Codes,": 142.

[59] Ibid, 144-145.

[60] Ibid, 146-147.

general public and winning horse photographs[61]. Other informal or semi-formal styles still practiced today particularly in diplomatic, cultural, political or business environments include the cocktail dress[62] or a simple shirt-and-dress precursor of today's 'ladies business casual' outfit[63]. The 'ladies business suit'[64], popularised for semi-formal occasions, also known as a 'pant suit' mainly in connection to Hillary Clinton, would have been unacceptable for such occasions in interwar Romania. Yet the suit itself can become a costume if worn at a costumed party or in another context as a reference to the character.

In an interwar Romanian context, formal dress had deviated in certain respects from the limitations of the nineteenth century, yet the general rules were still observed. As part on the literature dedicated to the ongoing 1931 ball season, *Ilustraţiunea Română (The Romanian Illustration)* offered a comparison between ball etiquette between 1859 and 1931. The main theme is the relationship between respectability and glove-less hands. The unnamed author recounted an 1859 article in a "Parisian newspaper" about the "scandalous news" of certain "ladies from the aristocracy" who "dared" to remove their gloves at the Vienna Opera during the show, only to put them back on at the end. For the 1931 woman, on the other hand, gloves were "but an accessory" to be removed as soon as one enters a room as the lady remained "with her back bare to the waist." The author compared the mid-nineteenth-century fashionable women's display of uncovered shoulders and emphasized chest to the dismay generated by "the indecency of ungloved hands." This would then prove "once more the strangeness of the principles regarding decency and fashion"[65].

"I'm Dressed in a 1939 Chanel Costume"

In January 1930, *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* published an illustrated anonymous article about how elaborate costume ball gowns could be,

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[61] "Le 'prix de la mode' à Băneasa," *Le Moment*, 692, (13 June 1937):8.
[62] Arifon, "Invitations and Dress Codes,": 148.
[63] Ibid, 150.
[64] Ibid, 149.
[65] "Fiindcă e sezonul balurilor", *Ilustraţiunea Română*, III/9, (26 February 193):17.

even if worn only for one evening. The article starts with a paradox in a perceived general attitude about such glamorous outfits. They were universally recognisable, it claimed, yet everybody has been complaining about them and cursing them silently, "even if in speech we praised them." For the author, these gowns were "waving illusions in lace and silk" intended to "cheat reality" and had a meteoric life, as much as illusion itself. Indeed, these costumes were "the most superfluous necessity, the most unattained wish, the ugliest beauty" as "the most paradoxical invention contrived by the human mind." This 'masterpiece,' the article continued, maintained its appeal until the evening in question, when everybody involved, from the "Ma'am" to her husband and her seamstress, seemed to lose their enthusiasm. And when "Ma'am" was no longer confident about her costume, the author surmised, she would be content with any sort of positive attention, even from children or a "barefaced Don Juan or fossilised septuagenarian." Even "those consecrated with prizes" would then be "secretly consumed by the thought that maybe the prize was granted to them, only due to occult insistence," consumed with envy for the runner-up with a perceivably more gorgeous outfit[66].

The understanding of costume is primarily connected to role playing, either literally on the stage and screen or fulfilling the duties of a certain position. In the former sense, the idea of design remains as crucial as with fashion, but it requires a different methodological approach. Despite unavoidable intermingling, particularly from cinema to the catwalk, costume design "is an entirely different practice from fashion design"[67]. Apart from the visible distinction seen in elaborate historical costumes, even when conceiving contemporary costumes, designers rely on "character and story"[68], instead of the above-mentioned mystifying nature of fashion messaging. This perspective is also mirrored in clothing descriptions from literary works to express a character's physical and personality traits[69]. Drawing meaning from works of art by

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[66] "Rochii pentru o singură seară", *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, III/129, (4 January 1930):19.
[67] Boumaroun, "Becoming Annie": 653.
[68] Ibid, 654.
[69] Cristina Giorcelli and Paula Rabinowitz, *Fashioning the Nineteenth Century*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 2-3.

analysing how the sitters or subjects are dressed and the way they wear their clothes can equally provide clues about the context, history, culture and the potential agendas behind the works of art themselves and everybody involved in their creation and display[70]. An interwar Romanian example is a 1929 article published in *Ilustraţiunea Română* about the so-called "intelligent extra" category in Hollywood cinema, by a James Ingram, possibly a direct translation from English. According to Ingram, this type of extra could be cast in "certain third-grade and even second-grade roles" and a lack of a third extra category apart from the simple and intelligent was perceived as a way for studios to avoid further costs. The author claimed that most such artists were the so-called "extra girls," of which "80% of commitments are made based on 'friendships'" luring young women with the promise of Hollywood stardom, without much return afterwards[71]. Apart from their pleasant physique, extras were supposed to present a certain scene or character in the background, telling an even more silent story through their appearance.

Costume can also imply the use of specific cuts, shapes and fabrics as an identity marker of the wearer. The purpose was to clearly delineate the social and economic elite classes from the rest of the population either through ostensibly impractical styles and physical traits or by mandating which social class or individual can wear certain textiles or colours[72]. This practice has been regulated for centuries by sumptuary laws throughout the world and across cultural divides. The main fear has been the inability to tell social classes apart due to the wider availability and subsequent extravagant usage of luxury items, including gold and silk[73]. In the Romanian context, in his book on the history of costume, Constantin Oros traced the term 'costume' to Louis XIII from a Latin root meaning "usage." as opposed to the general *vestimentaţie*, or 'dress'[74]. Oros also rejects theories for the birth of fashion from Ancient

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[70] Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993), xi.
[71] James Ingram, "Figuraţia inteligentă," *Ilustraţiunea Română*, I/5, (25 July 1929): 13.
[72] Barber and Lobel, ""Fashion" in Women's Clothes" :125.
[73] Beebe, "Intellectual Property Law and the Sumptuary Code": 811.
[74] Constantin Oros, *Pagini din istoria costumului*, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1998), 64-65.

Egypt or at the moment around the Renaissance when garments have become gender specific. Instead, he proposed a simpler definition as "the periodic change of form, size and colour" nowadays worthy to be deemed as a science[75]. Yet at the same time, his book's title refers to 'costume,' while it includes both references and chapters dedicated to 'dress' and 'fashion.'

In their social context, a costume's presence is mostly felt through costume balls and parties, especially within the notion known in the Anglo-Saxon sphere as 'fancy dress.' Even in the interwar era, such historical pageants could gather hundreds of participants who donned a variety of attires from the past or ethnic garments from distant and exotic lands. Accuracy, however, was not a prerequisite. Still in a symbolic realm, pageant costumes would thus blend reality and fantasy[76], where historical reality and traditional dress was merely a suggestion, open to the wearer's interpretation and imagination. As a practice particularly in the United Kingdom, historical pageants organized in the early twentieth century represented a fruitful occasion for women's organisations to participate socially and showcase their skills and talents[77]. These events had a close continental relative in carnivals, but with specific attire, styles and patterns. In 1930s, *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată* announced the imminent "triumphal entrance" of "His Highness the Carnival" for the "St. Epiphany day" on January 21st, already perceptible around interwar Bucharest through celebrations and preparations "for reediting the ancient Saturnalias and Bacchanals." As the article explained, this was the official opening for the year's masked ball season for "endless crowds" of "merry-makers" donning "the most fantasist and daring travesties." From the anonymous author's description, the carnival season remains rooted into its traditional function as an avenue for

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[75] Ibid, 180-181.

[76] Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Alexander Hutton, and Paul Readman. "Introduction," in *Restaging the Past: Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain*, (eds) Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Alexander Hutton and Paul Readman (London: UCL Press, 2020), 2.

[77] Zoë Thomas, "Historical Pageants, Citizenship and the Performance of Women's History before Second-Wave Feminism" in *Restaging the Past. Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain*, (eds) Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Alexander Hutton, and Paul Readman, (London: UCL Press, 2020), 109-110.

individuals to forego their mundane, limited or colourless realities and appearance for a one-night extravagant and creative look. The article proceeded to offer costume suggestions that blended an "ultra-modern style" with themed outfits inspired by literature, gastronomy, theatre, flora, fauna and current events. Even more, the author suggested peasant costumes especially for women were "an inexhaustible source for travesties," coupled with other "precious possibilities for carnivalesque transformations," namely traditional attires from Western Europe, Russia, Japan or 'the Orient.' The article also presented illustrations and translated captions originally published in "the well-known publication" *Le croquis original (The Original Croquis)* for its special carnival issue[78].

Cosplay is a more recent descendent of costumed balls and historical pageants available to the general public, owing to "the growing visibility of fan communities"[79]. It began as chiefly connected to East-Asian culture but has nowadays extended to "dressing up as" a particular character or personality regardless of origin, outside of Halloween costumes. Yet, donning an interwar fashionable costume in the twenty-first century would befall more on the costume ball category, unless it represents a particular character or celebrated personality associated with the era. In a theatrical or cinematic context historical accuracy has only recently been added as an important element in judging costumes. As Anne Hollander observed, since the nineteenth century and the most part of the twentieth century, costuming in period plays or movies was based on "purely fanciful" designs for characters wearing "essentially fashionable clothes" "posing as authentic historical dress." Consequently, borrowing from the allegorical representations in classical painting, historical costumes have been "filtered through current styles in reality"[80]. An example of how past fashions can become costumes would be a 1938 article from *Jurnalul Doamnei* recounting a ball organised by the British Royal House at Buckingham Palace for King Carol II of Romania and his son, then-Grand Voievode of Alba Iulia, Michael of Romania, with the crinoline as a sartorial theme. For the article's anonymous author, the crinoline had become a poetic way of turning any

[78] "M. Sa Carnavalul." *Gazeta Noastră Ilustrată*, III/130, (11 January 1930):28.
[79] Boumaroun, "Becoming Annie" : 650.
[80] Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 294-295.

woman into a Victorian princess, in a fantasy exploring the "charms of the past, the echoes of legend." By looking at pictures taken at the ball, the author felt a connection to the past, as a bridge of imagination between two worlds separated by time[81].

Consequently, dress is generalised and it can extend to any form of body covering, while fashion is the modern notion of ephemeral styles and costume a specific form of dress used either as a pastiche or as a form of character expression. Therefore, as the phrase in the subtitle states, when verbalising the term 'dress' as the act of putting on and wearing a certain garment, one can either imply donning a fashionable item or a costume. If the Chanel dress were worn in 1939 and perhaps until the mid-1940s, it could have been seen as a fashion choice. If the wearer is in the twenty-first century, then it is most likely a costume. At the same time, when only details or specific elements from the Chanel outfit are added to an otherwise contemporary-looking style, then it could be interpreted as a fashion statement.

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[81] "Crinolina," *Jurnalul Doamnei*, 4, (1938) :1.